



GOOD-BYE. Mr. G. Tomlinson, Minister of Education, speaking at the handing-over ceremony held when the Wright biplane left its place of honour at the Science Museum.

## The Original Wright Returns to America: Reminiscences of the Early Flying Days

# BACK to the BEGINNING

**I**N these days of sonic speeds it is salutary to reflect that the very first power-driven flight in which man ascended into the air in a heavier-than-air machine, flew it under control, and landed it safely again, was made less than half a century ago. The date was December 17th, 1903, the place Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the machine the Wright biplane, and the man Orville Wright.

Several years elapsed before the world in general received convincing proof that Wilbur and Orville Wright really *could* fly, and when it was finally established beyond doubt that Orville Wright had made the first controlled flight, his compatriots for a time denied the brothers the honour which was their due. Attempts were made to prove that the Langley "Aerodrome," as it was called (a very flimsy contraption with its wings in tandem), could

have flown, and when both the Langley and Wright machines were exhibited in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., the placard on the Langley machine bore wording which was not in accordance with facts.

In the meantime, Wilbur Wright had died, and it was left for Orville to carry on the fight for recognition. Patent litigations and the treatment given the brothers by the Smithsonian embittered him to such an extent that he ordered his machine to be removed from that institution and sent to England, where, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Griffith Brewer, the validity of the claims of the brothers Wright was recognized. The first aeroplane to fly properly was given the place of honour in the Science Museum, South Kensington, London. That was in 1928, and, except for the war period, when it was removed for safe keeping, the original Wright biplane remained at South Kensington until October 18th, when it was lowered and crated ready for its return to America in November.

The return of the Wright biplane to the land of its birth was in accordance with the wishes of the late Orville Wright, expressed in 1943. By that time a new secretary, Dr. Charles G. Abbott, had taken over at the Smithsonian; he examined the histories of the Wright and Langley machines, and, as a result, had the offending placard removed from the Langley. Not only so, but he publicly acknowledged the injustice previously done to the Wrights.

It was, therefore, natural that Orville Wright should wish to have the machine returned to the Smithsonian Institution. The handing-over ceremony, which at one time threatened to have precious little to do with aviation, was finally made the occasion for a gathering of representatives of the British aviation world. This was due to the efforts of the Royal Aeronautical Society, and more specifically to its secretary, Captain Pritchard, and his assistant, Miss Bar-

Mr. L. Satterthwaite, American Civil Air Attaché, examines the Wright engine after officially receiving the machine for return to Washington.

